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WORLD OF SPORT

99ers Trade Eagles

It's all WORLD OF SPORT TODAY

Strike off today after mass shutdown

EVELYN GORDON and Itim

SOME 250,000 workers went on strike yesterday, as the nation suffered yet another day of work stoppages that shut down vital services, affecting everything from banks to Internet connections.

The strike affected almost the entire public sector, although unlike Sunday's shutdowns, yesterday saw the strike broken at several work places.

Finance Minister Dan Meridor and Histadrut chairman Amir Peretz met for three hours last night to discuss the ongoing strike. After a meeting with the strike committee, Peretz announced that Histadrut officials had decided to cancel today's strike for 24 hours.

Meridor earlier said he would prefer to negotiate with the Histadrut rather than be forced to issue more restraining orders. He accused the Histadrut of running roughshod over the legal system and undermining the Knesset's standing as a legislative body.

"It is time for the Histadrut and its leadership to show some responsibility and stop this step, which has no real justification or real reason," he said. He denied the strike broke out because of a lack of communication between the government and the Histadrut.

According to the Histadrut, the strike is largely directed against two elements of the economic arrangements bill accompanying the budget - a proposal to tax the ports, airports, and railways, and a proposal to eliminate the extra half tax-credit married women currently enjoy. The latter, which was a last-minute addition to the bill on the government's part, is to come up for a vote in the plenum this afternoon. (See story, Page 3)

The former, however, is essentially a lost cause, since it was approved in second reading last week. Once a section of a bill has been approved in second reading, the only way for it to be killed would be for the coalition to vote against the entire bill.

Knesset Speaker Dan Tichon met yesterday with both Meridor and Peretz, but said afterward that he did not intend to try to mediate between the two. Tichon said the purpose of the meeting was merely to understand the two sides' positions, since the dispute may result in procedural arguments being raised during the voting on the economic arrangements bill. Tichon would have to rule on any such arguments.

According to an aide to Tichon, Peretz said that President Ezer Weizman had called him from India to ask him to end the strike.

Meridor reiterated to Tichon that he sees no justification in giving women an extra tax credit just because they are women, as opposed to the tax credits they get, for instance, for having children.

"He told Tichon he is willing to sit down and talk with Peretz at any point, but on condition that the strikers obey injunctions issued by the labor courts. The government cannot countenance contempt of the courts, he said.

From 6 a.m. yesterday, the nation's health system, including Kupat Holim clinics, government hospitals, and community services were shut down. Hospitals were on a Shabbat footing, and hundreds of operations and treatments

(Continued on Page 3)

US: No deadlines in Hebron pact

Ross meets PM, Arafat to close deal

DAVID MAKOVSKY and JON IMMANUEL

THE attached American document accompanying the Hebron accord is not expected to include future deadlines related to Palestinian and Israeli compliance with the Oslo Accords, with the exception of the first IDF pullback beyond Hebron and the resumption of final status talks, US officials said yesterday.

Special Middle East peace coordinator Dennis Ross, who returned here yesterday in a bid to seal the deal, met last night with Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and then was expected to begin talks with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat.

Ross is expected to meet again with Netanyahu today to follow-up the Arafat meeting. The results of those meetings will determine if there is an adequate basis for a meeting today between Netanyahu and Arafat to initial the deal. One official put the odds at "50-50."

Israel has been seeking an American document, called "Note for the Record," which will deal with questions of extradition of suspected Palestinian terrorists, disarming Hamas, and reducing the size of Palestinian security forces. However, no deadlines are attached.

Senior Israeli officials have already admitted that there is no linkage in the US document between Israeli and Palestinian compliance.

It is also possible that there may be a date for the release of four Palestinian prisoners who were accomplices to murder.

In the document, Israel agrees to open parallel talks on other issues such as safe passage between the West Bank and Gaza, the opening of an airport in Gaza, and the easing of the closure.

In terms of dates, the

Palestinians are seeking assurances that Netanyahu will implement all three further pullbacks in the West Bank, and not seek to skip the last two by jumping directly to final status talks. Arafat and Israeli officials indicated last night.

While the Palestinians are seeking dates on all three additional pullbacks, some believe that they would be content with general language. Israel has committed itself to provide an exact date for the first pullback, but not the two others. According to the Oslo 2 agreement, all three pullbacks are scheduled to occur by next September.

Netanyahu has said he prefers to move up the final status talks, believing that the three pullbacks deprive him of territorial leverage, before dealing with such thorny issues as Jerusalem.

"We have exhausted the negotiations," one Netanyahu aide said last night. "If there are differences, they should be discussed between the leaders themselves; there is nothing more we can do."

Officials in the Prime Minister's Office say that Netanyahu also told Ross that Israel will not agree to joint Israeli-Palestinian patrols around the Maschpela Cave. Some have described this as a "red-line." One alternative being considered is that the Maschpela Cave would begin a liaison relationship with the local Israeli-Palestinian coordinating office.

Jamil Tarifi, the head of the Palestinian civilian delegation, told Israel Radio last night that there are aspects of construction in Jewish areas of Hebron that have not been resolved. However, Israel considers the civilian section of the accord closed.



US special envoy Dennis Ross (center), accompanied by US ambassador Martin Indyk (right), arrives at the Knesset for a meeting with Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu yesterday. (Reuters)

US to help Israel capitalize on agreement

DAVID MAKOVSKY

THE US has pledged to help Israel seize the momentum of a Hebron pullback agreement to improve its low regional standing, US officials said yesterday.

"We have told Israel that we will help it gain a bounce from a Hebron deal to help its regional position," said one US official, who would only say that he expects even the Egyptians to play a constructive role to this end.

Foreign Ministry officials say they are holding preliminary consultations with Arab countries to improve Israel's troubled regional position, which has deteriorated over the last several months.

Egypt has been one of the Netanyahu government's fiercest regional critics and has counseled the Palestinians not to accept Israeli positions in negotiations. Egyptian sources also complain that Israel has not consulted it enough during the talks. Yet last week, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak informed Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai that he would invite Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to Cairo after a Hebron deal.

Egyptian officials said last night that an exact date has yet to be fixed.

Netanyahu was last in Egypt in July, but subsequently Mubarak said he would not invite him back because he felt he violated a promise to pull out of Hebron within weeks. For the same reason, Mubarak did not attend the White House summit convened by President Bill Clinton after the Western Wall Tunnel incident.

Also due to the tunnel affair.

(Continued on Page 2)

Palestinian killed in Gush Katif

A PALESTINIAN who entered the Kfar Darom settlement in Gush Katif and tried to attack a resident there was shot and killed last night, a settlement spokeswoman said. The incursion took place at about 10:15 p.m.

IDF officials believe, after an initial investigation, that the Palestinian

was unarmed and without identification papers. They said he was shot while speaking into the settlement, by a resident who was following IDF regulations for shooting someone suspected of infiltration.

Kfar Darom residents were instructed by the IDF to stay inside their homes.

Herb Keiron

Woman, 52, gives birth to triplets

A 52-YEAR-OLD woman from Moshav Shalva in the South yesterday gave birth to her first children - triplets - by cesarean section at Beersheba's Soroka Hospital. She is the oldest woman in the country to give birth to triplets.

The embryos had been produced by in-vitro fertilization at the private Herzliya Medical Center, following five similar attempts in other hospitals during her 10-year marriage.

The woman, Tova Gamliel, and her husband Zion were thrilled over the birth of the healthy triplets, two boys and a girl. She had been hospitalized for a prolonged period at Soroka's high-risk pregnancy unit.

The hospitals did not disclose whether the ova had been donated by another woman, but this is usually the case when older women undergo IVF.

Judy Siegel

Tax-credit proposal defeated

THE government's proposal to eliminate the half tax-credit enjoyed by married women was defeated late last night,

but the rest of the Economic Arrangements Law accompanying the budget passed its second reading. Story, Page 3

Israelis love Arafat... when he's a puppet

Jerusalem Post Staff

YASSER Arafat may not win any popularity contests among the Israeli public, but the doll that imitates him on Channel 2's *Hartza'im* satire program was the hands-down winner in a Gallup poll for Army Radio this week.

Of the 511 people surveyed, 15.9 percent said the Arafat doll, whose fast-talking, smug charm always steals the show, is their favorite. In second place was the doll modelled after Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, with 10%. Opposition leader Shimon Peres took third place, with 6.7%, while Finance Minister Dan Meridor got 5.9%.

Army Radio host Razi Barkai revealed the list of most-popular dolls on "The Headlines" yesterday, and then phoned Arafat's Israeli Arab advisor, Dr. Ahmed Tibi, to find out what his boss thinks of the show.

Alas, Tibi said, Arafat has never seen *Hartza'im* because his TV doesn't receive Channel 2 broadcasts.

"If someone wants to send him a tape, I'm sure he'd like to watch it," Tibi said.

"He's a warm, family-like character," Tibi said, which is the exact opposite of the Israeli public's impression of him in real life.

"Abu Mazen [Mahmoud Abbas] asked me why his doll was wearing a red keffiyeh," Tibi told Barkai, noting that red keffiyehs are Jordanian.

Tibi admitted that Palestinian satire is virtually nonexistent.

"We haven't found an actor whose impersonations are as good as those of Tuvia Tsafir," he said, referring to the voice behind all the male dolls on the program.

Tsafir also put in an appearance on the show, admitting that the voice of Labor MK Ehud Barak is one of the more difficult for him to copy.

Despite all of Tsafir's effort, the Barak doll only rated eighth, with 1%, behind those of Ya'akov Ayalon, 3.1%, Tsomet leader Raphael Eitan, 2.3%, and Geshet leader David Levy, 1.8%. Barak's doll did manage to tie with Shas Rabbi Ovadia Yosef and to soundly top Communication Minister Limor Livnat and Science Minister Ze'ev Binyamin Begin, whose dolls attracted 0.4% and 0.2% respectively.

The Gallup survey also asked people to rank their least favorite characters on the show. Interestingly, the top four were the same as on the most-loved list - Netanyahu led with 7.6%, followed by Arafat, 6.5%, Meridor, 3.9%, and Peres, 2.5%. However, Livnat tied with Peres for fourth place. Ayalon, Levy, Barak, Eitan, Yosef and Begin also made the least favorite list. They were joined by Sarah Netanyahu, Shas leader Aryeh Deri and Avigdor Lieberman, director of the Prime Minister's Office.

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PM promises Hebron pact will be presented to Knesset for approval

Government handily defeats no-confidence bid

PRIME MINISTER Binyamin Netanyahu promised coalition MKs yesterday that the Hebron agreement would be submitted to the Knesset to vote on after it had been endorsed by the government. Netanyahu was hesitant to say when the agreement would be ready but said the negotiations are reaching a conclusion. He said the new agreement has at least 10 improvements on that reached by the previous government. He did not list all 10 points but noted that Jews in Hebron would not be in the range of fire of Palestinian forces; that an Israeli presence would be maintained on the hills overlooking the area of Hebron under Jewish control; and that the Jewish quarter "would not be strangled." He also said Jewish residents would not be dependent on the Arab Hebron Municipality for building permits.

LIAT COLLINS

The prime minister promised that Israel did not intend to leave or evacuate the Jewish settlement and would even strengthen it. He stressed that the agreement called for a redeployment in Hebron and not withdrawal from it. Science Minister Binyamin Ze'ev Begin, however, criticized the agreement saying that despite the improvements, 80 percent of the city was being handed over to Palestinian security control and that if Israel trusted the Palestinians so much they would not have to place so many restrictions on weapons there. Begin said that the limits on the quantities of arms had already been breached. The relationship between the prime minister and Begin seemed tense. When Begin thanked the premier for raising the Hebron

issue at the coalition meeting, Netanyahu said sarcastically: "I wanted to give you a chance to read your speech." MK Yehuda Harel (Third Way) said his faction had "confidence in the government" and he called on the rest of the coalition to also offer the government and prime minister support. Harel said the Third Way would remain in the coalition as long as the government does not violate certain principles: that Israel continue to withdraw from the parts of Judea and Samaria heavily populated by Arabs; that the redeployment does not harm Israeli control in Greater Jerusalem, the full length of the Jordan Valley, the south Hebron Hills and large settlement blocs not populated by Arabs; and that Israeli sovereignty on the Golan Heights would be the basis for any peace agreement with Syria.

MKS voted with their feet during yesterday's no-confidence motion over the Hebron agreement. The motion was defeated 47-2 with 34 abstentions, as only the two Moledet MKs, who had filed the no-confidence motion, supported it. A large number of MKs chose to absent themselves or not participate in the vote. Members of the National Religious Party, Democratic Arab Party, Shas, and Tsomet, other than Eliezer Zandberg, left the plenum before the vote. Several cabinet members were also noticeably absent: National Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon, Agriculture and Environment Minister Raphael Eitan, Education Minister Zevulun Hammer, and Transport Minister Yitzhak Levy. Science Minister Ze'ev Binyamin Begin voted with the government, saying it is his obligation as a member of the cabinet. He differentiated between the no-confidence motion and the vote on the Hebron agreement itself. Eitan said his absence was a message to the prime minister that the agreement is dangerous. Just before the vote, in an apparent effort to placate coalition partners, Foreign Minister David Levy told the plenum that the Hebron agreement will be presented for Knesset approval after it is signed and endorsed by the government. As a result, Michael Kleiner

LIAT COLLINS

(Gesher) voted with the government and said he would voice his opposition of the agreement when it came to the vote. Levy said Hebron will be a test for the continuation of the peace process and if peaceful coexistence is not preserved, there it will be a threat to the whole process. Moledet leader Rehavam Ze'evi said the government is leading to the creation of a Palestinian state. "Don't you see those of us who voted for you as partners? Who are you afraid of, Mr. Prime Minister? The US president? Are you scared of the Arabs? If so, you can't lead this Knesset. And you should know that war with the Arabs will break out when they see they have a chance to win, and it's not related to Oslo or the Palestinians." "We hoped and hoped, but in vain. We quickly discovered that the nationalist government is no more nationalist than its predecessor - and perhaps worse. The Netanyahu government is striding toward creating a Palestinian state." Levy stressed in his reply that Israel and the IDF could deal with the Palestinian response were it not to redeploy in Hebron, but would find it very difficult to cope with the interna-

tional backlash. He said that if the agreement in Hebron is not abided by and peace is not kept there, the whole process will collapse. He said Hebron is the test of reciprocity. Labor Party leader Shimon Peres proposed from the plenum concentrating on the Syrian track. "Don't delay. The price of peace doesn't go down; the cost goes up," he said. Peres said Labor has no confidence in the government and should not fudge its criticism of the way it reopened the agreement with the Palestinians and handled the negotiations. "What is there in Hebron? Holy places? The main holy places will stay in our hands under IDF responsibility," he said. Peres said the present government is so eager to blame its predecessors for all the problems that were the drought to continue, the cabinet secretary would issue a statement saying it is the Peres government's fault. At a faction meeting before the discussions, the NRP "decided not to give the government our confidence over the Hebron agreement as it our confidence right now, but not to leave the government so we can continue the struggle for Hebron and on the permanent arrangements," Hammer said. The NRP is demanding that Hammer be included in the group of ministers discussing the next stages of the negotiations with the Palestinians.

Court: State must show why IDF exemptees are blocked from national service

EVELYN GORDON

THE High Court of Justice yesterday gave the state 45 days to explain why Arabs and Jewish men exempt from army service should not be able to volunteer for national service and get the attendant financial benefits. Justice Yitzhak Zamir issued the show-cause order in response to a petition by the Association for Civil Rights in Israel and three individuals - Vivian Khoury, a Christian Arab; Marwat Marisat, a Beduin woman; and Eyal Daniel, a Jewish man exempt from the army for health reasons. The petition charged that not permitting Arabs or Jews who are exempt from regular service to volunteer for national service constitutes illegal discrimination, especially in light of the financial implications of that refusal. People who do either army or national service are entitled to financial benefits, such as mortgage and scholarship aid, and also are often given preference when applying for jobs or popular degree programs. In addition, the petition said, national service gives participants

a feeling of satisfaction and of belonging to society. About 18 months ago, the petition said, the Fund for Absorbing Demobilized Soldiers decided to accept Arabs and Jews exempt from regular army duty into national service programs at the recommendation of the Defense Ministry. A few months later, the National Insurance Institute - which is responsible for approving national service programs - decided to overturn this policy. The petition charged that the entire concept of linking financial rights to army service is discriminatory, as long as Arabs are not permitted to serve, because it means that only Jews get such benefits. However, it said, the discriminatory character of this policy seems even more blatant when Arabs are not even allowed to volunteer for national service. The government's rationale for the financial benefits has always been that those who do army or national service deserve compensation for the lost years of their lives. Arabs are not accepted into the army for security reasons.



Labor MK Ehud Barak (left) speaks to reporters alongside MK Uzi Baram, who announced yesterday he would not run for Labor Party leader but instead would support Barak's candidacy. (Brian Hender)

Baram decides not to run, backs Barak

SARAH HONIG

LABOR MK Uzi Baram announced yesterday that he will not be competing for the party leadership and that he will back Ehud Barak. The two appeared together at a press conference and hotly denied that they had struck a deal promising Baram the No. 2 position in the party and the portfolio of his choice should Barak form a future government. Nevertheless, Baram coined the term "the Barak-Baram camp" and was careful throughout to use it. Labor leader Shimon Peres, who is being challenged by Barak, was reported to have called Baram's move "opportunism."

Yossi Bellin, who has also thrown his hat in the Labor leadership ring, welcomed Baram's decision, saying that since Barak is a hawk and Baram a recognized dove, "many of Baram's supporters have already called me and told me that they cannot bring themselves to support a man like Barak and that they are switching their allegiance to me." Baram had a lot of fancy explaining to do about his decision, since he had recently lashed out at Barak, calling him "a man full of suspicion and distrust. He is a paranoid. He practices power

politics and suffers from delusions of power and grandeur. His positions are worse than those of the right-wing." Baram did not fully retract these statements, and only said that "we have very different political outlooks, and Barak and I are very different personalities. He is new to politics and I don't really know him very well. We will continue deliberations and I hope there will be cooperation between us. I will be very happy if in future I can report that I have changed my mind." "We are very different people,"

Barak said. "We complement each other." Baram claimed he decided not to run for the party leadership because of opinion polls which show that Barak has a better chance of winning. If Barak forms a government, Baram said he would like the Foreign Affairs portfolio, "though now, three-and-a-half years before the election, it would be silly to make deals over portfolios." Officials in the Prime Minister's Office originally hoped to capitalize on a Hebron deal by having Netanyahu visit the US in January, in an apparent bid to refashion his American media image as a peacemaker. However, the US has privately informed Netanyahu - who has already visited the US three times in six months - that January would be a poor month to visit.

New rules for judicial appointments

THE Committee for Judicial Appointments yesterday announced new rules for judicial appointments. As of March 3, the names of judicial candidates will be announced at least 21 days in advance, and anyone will be able to present the committee with detailed reasons for his opposition to any of the candidates. The committee also announced the names of 12 judicial appointments: To Tel Aviv District Court - Nissim Yeshaya, Hadassah Ahitov, and Hila Gershter, all of whom are currently serving on the Tel Aviv Magistrate's Court; To Nazareth District Court - Aharon Aminof, currently serving on the Nazareth Magistrate's Court; To the Northern District Magistrate's Court - A'ada Sa'ad, who now serves on a labor court, the only female Arab judge in the country; Bracha Samson, and Esther Helman; To Jerusalem Family Court, Nili Maimon; To Tel Aviv Family Court - Yehuda Granit and Tzila Tzfat; and To Jerusalem Labor Court - Dita Prozhinin and Ari Tivon. The committee also decided to make permanent the appointment of Tel Aviv Labor Court Judge Yehoshua Halevy. (Itim)

Egypt extends detention of Azzam

CAIRO (Reuters) - Alleged Israeli spy Azzam made his first public appearance in an Egyptian court yesterday and was remanded in custody for another 45 days, witnesses said. Ali Wahbi, the judge presiding over the remand hearing, ordered Azzam, 35, out of a courtroom cage to defend himself in an emotional session attended by Israeli embassy officials and relatives, they added. Wahbi ordered Azzam, chief mechanic at an Israeli-owned textile factory in Egypt, to be held for a second 45-day period. Security authorities arrested Azzam in

Cairo last month along with Egyptian national Emadeddin Abdel Hamid. Azzam has not been formally charged and no date has been set for his trial. Arriving in the court, he hugged his two brothers and wept. One of the brothers is working in Egypt, security sources said. "Treatment is good at the prison and the consul is visiting me frequently," Azzam told reporters in a brief statement, before he asked them to talk only to his lawyer. The Israeli consul, Shuki Gabai, attended the session. The prosecutor said in his statement to the court: "This defendant wanted to harm the

country which is seeking peace... but they (the Israelis) repaid this with ingratitude." The prosecutor said Azzam had facilitated a sexual affair between Abdel Hamid and one of two Israeli-Arab women involved in the case - large - Mona Ahmed Shawahna and Zahra Youssef Greiss. Azzam himself is of Arab origin. "He (Abdel Hamid) did not respond to Azzam's pressures for the sake of any principle, but in return for lusts, sex and money," he added. Azzam denied the espionage allegations. He said the last time he met Abdel Hamid was in Israel in February.

Among prosecution evidence were clothes described as producing invisible ink when washed. Israel has insisted Azzam is innocent and demands his release. A court earlier this month extended Abdel Hamid's detention for 45 days. The prosecution was expected to issue the charge sheet a few weeks ago, amid reports that it was waiting for a political decision in the case. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has said Israeli leaders squandered the chance to secure Azzam's release through quiet diplomacy by making the affair public.

NEWS IN BRIEF

118 hurt in road accidents
A total of 118 drivers, passengers and pedestrians were injured in 81 accidents across the country yesterday. Three people were hurt, one seriously, yesterday afternoon when three cars collided near Nebi Samwil on the Jerusalem-Givat Ze'ev road. A pedestrian was seriously injured after he was hit by a bus near the Afula bus station. Mustafay Abu Nimar, 24, of Tamra, near Acre, was killed Sunday night when his car hit a guard rail in his village after he lost control of the vehicle. (Itim)

Knesset clerk retires
Knesset Clerk Shmuel Jacobson resigned from his post yesterday after 46 years service in the House. Knesset Speaker Dan Tichon praised Jacobson for his work and extensive knowledge of the Knesset House Rules. His replacement Arie Hahn will assume the post tomorrow. Jacobson will continue to be a special Knesset adviser. (Liat Collins)

Immigrant doctors to keep jobs
Immigration and Absorption Committee chairwomen Nadori Blumenthal (Likud) said the threat to fire 630 immigrant doctors had been lifted. She noted that Yisrael Ba'alya MKs had told the Finance Committee that they would

make their support of the Health Ministry's budget conditional on the Finance Ministry's abiding by a promise to continue the funding of the doctors. (Liat Collins)

Lack of Reka news decried
Absorption Minister Yuli Edelstein yesterday sent a strong letter of complaint to Israel Broadcasting Authority Director-General Mordechai Kirschenbaum, saying that the lack of news broadcasts on Reka, the radio station which broadcasts in Russian and Amharic, among other languages, had left hundreds of thousands of immigrants in the dark about the strike and what services were closed. Israel Radio continued its news broadcasts on other stations. (Liat Collins)

Chai Vekayam leader fined
Chai Vekayam leader Yehuda Etzion was sentenced to a NIS 1,000 fine and a suspended sentence for his attempts to pray on the Temple Mount. Etzion said that he would refuse to pay the fine and instead would serve a 20-day prison term. Etzion said the state should compensate him for not being able to pray on the Temple Mount, and not the opposite. He vowed to try to pray there again, after other court cases revolving around his previous attempts to do so are cleared up. (Itim)

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מכתב האוכל

Police say more than 300 dead in India train blast

AT least 300 people were believed to have been killed yesterday when a powerful bomb ripped through several carriages of a packed train in India's northeastern state of Assam, police said.

Local railway officials said 35 or 40 bodies had so far been recovered by emergency workers struggling through the mangled wreckage but said the death toll was expected to be much higher.

If the toll of 300 or more is confirmed, it would make the attack the second most devastating guerrilla action on record. In June 1985, Sikh extremists were blamed for a bomb on an Air India Boeing 747 which crashed into the sea off Ireland, killing 329 people.

In December 1988, 270 died when a bomb destroyed a Pan American Boeing 747 over the Scottish town of Lockerbie.

The Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency quoted officials as saying the death toll was at least 300.

A senior police official told Reuters in Assam's biggest city of Guwahati that suspected separatist Bodo militants had used a remote-controlled device packed with explosives to blow up the Delhi-bound Brahmaputra Mail.

BISWAJYOTI DAS
GUWAHATI, India

Hundreds of people were travelling ahead of the New Year holiday on the express train, named after the sacred river that flows through the northeast.

"Bodo guerrillas blew up three coaches of a passenger train killing at least 300 people at Sensapani railway station," the police official told Reuters.

There was no immediate word on how many were injured.

Sensapani is 200 km west of Guwahati, hub of the oil-producing and tea-rich state, and rescuers struggled to reach the remote area in pitch darkness.

Railway officials said no rescue team could reach the site until about midnight local time.

Describing the explosion, the police official said: "They used RDX (plastic explosives) and a remote-controlled device."

RDX became widely known in India after it was used in a series of bomb blasts that killed 260 people in Bombay in March, 1993.

Police in the town of Kokrajhar said local

residents had heard two loud explosions and suggested the attack may have involved two bombs.

The train had left Kokrajhar for Delhi around 7 p.m. yesterday.

The attack came a day after tribal Bodo guerrillas blew up a road bridge that formed the main link between India's northeast regions and the rest of the country, injuring seven people.

Activists representing Bodo tribesmen living north of the Brahmaputra river want a homeland within India in the state of Assam, but an extremist fringe, the Bodoland Army, has been fighting for a separate nation since 1989.

"This is the worst incident of separatist violence in Assam this year," the police official said. Most of the passengers were believed to be holiday-makers heading for Delhi to celebrate the New Year.

Police said none of the several guerrilla groups operating in Assam had claimed responsibility for the blast.

More than 5,000 people have been killed in ethnic and separatist violence in Assam during the last three years. (Reuters)

Peru expects peaceful end to hostage crisis

PERUVIAN Prime Minister Alberto Pandolfi said yesterday he expected the siege at the Japanese ambassador's residence to end with all 83 remaining hostages released unharmed by their Marxist captors.

"We are sure that the continuing sound handling of the situation will allow a solution that protects the physical well-being and lives of all of the hostages," the head of the cabinet said in a speech.

"The government is working permanently with prudence and dedication for the prompt release" of the hostages, he added, without giving more details.

Although there has been no public word for nine days from President Alberto Fujimori - who keeps the final decision-making for himself - Pandolfi's words echoed the new mood of optimism from the weekend.

Government negotiator Education Minister Domingo Palermo met guerrilla leader Nestor Cerpa Carolini Saturday in the first face-to-face contact between the two sides since the crisis began on December 17.

Their meeting was followed by the release of 20 more hostages by rebels of the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA), prompting hopes the rest would follow quickly.

But by yesterday afternoon, there was no new move from the roughly 20 rebels. Heavily armed with grenades and automatic rifles, they have booby-trapped and mined the residence in Lima's fashionable San Isidro district.

The international MRTA spokesman condemned a "solidarity" bomb attack at the Peruvian embassy in Athens by the Guerrilla Fighting Group, another militant leftist organization.

"We reject this sort of display of solidarity because it does not con-

ANDREW CAWTHORNE
LIMA

tribute to the solution of a crisis," Isaac Velazco told Reuters in a telephone interview from Hamburg, Germany.

Earlier yesterday, hostages trapped at the besieged ambassador's home sent letters to families - the first correspondence allowed out in four days.

Relatives of the captives, suffering their 13th day under rebel guns, went to Red Cross headquarters in Lima to pick up scores of messages scrawled on special forms provided by the organization. Red Cross officials also took food and supplies to the residence.

The family of Jesuit priest Juan Julio Wicht, who is among the captives, released a letter he wrote over Christmas.

The priest jovially boasted that he was unbeaten at chess after eight games with Japanese and Peruvian diplomats.

"I am well and I am doing a lot of good for everyone here in such

difficult circumstances," wrote Wicht, who opted to stay in the residence despite being offered freedom. He has held various masses for the captives.

"I am here on a mission and I feel your support and prayers... I am simply doing what any of you or any Jesuit would do, but better than I."

He said tensions were rising and nights spent on the floor of the house were long and hot. But "we hostages maintain our unity and spirits, we pray together and we sing although we do not have the words... God is helping us."

The remaining hostages include President Alberto Fujimori's brother Pedro, top Peruvian police and government officials and about 20 Japanese businessmen.

As New Year approached, police and civil leaders called on Peruvians to tone down celebrations in sympathy with the hostages, and to refrain from using fireworks - particularly around the residence - so as not to alarm the rebels. (Reuters)



body is taken from the wreckage after two people were killed and 17 injured when a single locomotive collided with a passenger train in northern Italy yesterday. (Reuters)

Bomb explodes at Peru Embassy in Athens

ATHENS, Greece (AP) - A powerful bomb explosion rocked the entrance to the Peruvian embassy in central Athens yesterday, injuring a female passerby, police said.

They said the young woman suffered mild cuts from flying pieces of glass that showered the entrance of the building housing the Peruvian embassy.

Sky television, a private network, said an anonymous caller telephoned the station to say the attack was waged in support of the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement.

The Marxist organization has been holding 83 captives at the Japanese embassy residence in Peru for the past 13 days.

Greek police sped to the site of the explosion and sealed off streets surrounding the Peruvian embassy located on the second floor of an apartment block on Queen Sophia Avenue.

Officials said the explosion was triggered by a make-shift bomb that damaged a door and shattered windows.

Army swears unity on 41st day of Belgrade marches

BELGRADE (Reuters) - The Yugoslav army denied yesterday that it was split over support for Serbian president in his dispute with the opposition as demonstrators lit the streets of Belgrade for the 41st day.

Booyed by an apparent statement of support from dissident army officers, the demonstrators renewed their demands that Milosevic recognize opposition wins in November's local elections.

An unsigned and unauthenticated letter, read out before 50,000 opposition supporters Sunday, warned Milosevic its authors, which apparently included men of the elite 63rd Paratroop Brigade, would refuse to fire on demonstrators if ordered to do so.

The letter also warned the opposition Zajedno (Together) coalition that it too would be toppled in its turn if it became autocratic in power.

But an official army statement later stressed its unity, though it made no pledge of loyalty to Milosevic who has struggled for six weeks to contain the protests that have paralyzed Belgrade for more than six hours every day.

The protest wave, made despite police moves to drive demonstrators off the main streets, is the most sustained popular push for democratization in 50 years of leftist one-party rule in Serbia-led Yugoslavia.

Five thousand university students tried to march across the Sava river bridge yesterday but were blocked by police and forced to retreat into a pedestrian mall.

Later, tens of thousands of people backing Zajedno massed in Republic Square with riot police packing adjacent streets to prevent protesters swarming into traffic zones.

Dejan Bulatovic, a Zajedno activist who had been beaten while in police custody, appeared at the rally after he was released yesterday having served 25 days in jail for carrying an effigy of Milosevic in prison garb.

"They are wrong if they think we have achieved nothing in these 41 days," one of Zajedno's leaders Zoran Djindjic told the crowd. "We began by chasing a fox which stole our votes and ended up driving a dinosaur out of its lair."

With the streets sealed off by the authorities, Zajedno also confined its now traditional march to the pedestrian mall, walking in circles and jearing at the cordons of riot police.

Up to a quarter of a million people have rallied daily in Serbia against Milosevic's annulment of November 17 mimical elections in 14 cities, including Belgrade, won by Zajedno.

Post-war Guatemala must bury hatreds

GUATEMALA CITY (Reuters) - Guatemala began its post-war era yesterday facing the enormous challenge of burying a history of fratricidal hatred and overcoming deep skepticism about its future after 36 years of guerrilla war.

"The problem with Guatemala is that civil war has become almost institutionalized," a western diplomat said.

Guatemalans turned out in the tens of thousands Sunday to wit-

ness the end of one of Latin America's most enduring and brutal conflicts in which 100,000 people died and some 40,000 "disappeared" in counter-insurgency sweeps.

The scale of the devastation, mostly suffered during the years of military dictatorship in the 1960s to 1980s, meant the celebration was more reflective than euphoric, and many - particularly on the left - were openly sceptical.

Before both sides effectively halted military operations last March, conflict had long been pocketed in the remote highlands, home mostly to Indians that make up a downtrodden majority in the Central American country.

Ideological factions still run deep. "In terms of the political polarizations that have been created over the past 36 years, they are wounds which will take a long time to heal," the diplomat said.

Security Council fears Iraq may be hiding Russian missile parts

NITED NATIONS (AP) - Fearing Iraq may have hidden missile engines and parts that could be used to build prohibited weapons, the Security Council condemned Iraq yesterday for not cooperating with UN inspectors.

Iraq refused the inspectors' request, earlier this month, to take about 130 Russian-made missiles to a US lab and determine whether Iraq removed their engines and key parts, substituting lower-grade Iraqi ones.

"Maybe they are very afraid of this investigation," said Rolf Ekeus, who chairs the inspection team. "How many significant components have been removed from the actual 11 missiles before they were destroyed?"

Ekeus and other inspectors believe Iraq may plan to put Russian engines and parts - which are better than ones Iraq has technology to build - into Iraqi-made missiles, thereby making them more powerful and accurate.

"Why would you keep them unless you want-

ed to stick them with something that could be made indigenously?" said Ewen Buchanan, an aide to Ekeus on the inspection team, known as the UN Special Commission on Iraq, or Unscocm.

Ekeus said Iraqi officials in one case even admitted that Iraq had replaced a Russian engine with an Iraqi one.

Unscocm officials want to inspect the missiles at the US Army Missile Command in Huntsville, Alabama, which they said is the best facility in the world for intricate missile testing.

Iraqi UN ambassador Nizar Hamdoon said Iraq was cooperating with the commission but does not want the missiles taken to the US, rather than Russia, for inspection.

"If it is to be taken elsewhere to be investigated, it should be taken to the country of origin," he said, adding that he hoped the disagreement would be resolved "in the coming weeks."

Under terms of UN resolutions ending the 1991 Gulf War, Iraq is to get rid of all weapons of mass destruction, including missiles that can travel more than 150 km.

Deputy US ambassador Edward Gnehm yesterday expressed pleasure at a statement the Security Council adopted that "deplores the refusal by Iraq" to allow inspectors to remove the missiles.

"What we're seeing here in this particular episode is the continuation of Iraq to obstruct through manipulation and deception the activities of Unscocm," he said.

Ekeus on December 18 reported that Iraq not only has missiles, but also rocket launchers, fuel and a command system to "make a missile force of significance" that could threaten its neighbors.

During the Gulf War, Iraq fired missiles at Israel, killing two people, and at Saudi Arabia, killing 28 US soldiers.

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INTL STOCK MARKETS

New York market indexes

Table with columns for index name, last price, and change. Includes DJ Industrial, DJ Transport, NYSE Composite, etc.

NYSE stocks

Table listing NYSE stocks with columns for stock name, last price, and change.

Other stock market indexes

Table listing other stock market indexes with columns for index name, last price, and change.

Israeli stocks in US

Table listing Israeli stocks in US with columns for stock name, last price, and change.

NYSE /AMEX /NASDAQ /OTC

Table listing NYSE, AMEX, NASDAQ, and OTC stocks with columns for stock name, last price, and change.

Foreign financial data courtesy of CommStock Trading Ltd.

INTL MONEY MARKETS

Dollar crosses (US)

Table listing dollar crosses with columns for currency, last price, and change.

Libor rates

Table listing Libor rates with columns for rate type, last price, and change.

Foreign financial data courtesy of CommStock Trading Ltd.

INTL COMMODITIES AND METALS

US commodities

Table listing US commodities with columns for commodity name, last price, and change.

London commodities

Table listing London commodities with columns for commodity name, last price, and change.

Spot market metals (US)

Table listing spot market metals with columns for metal name, last price, and change.

New York metal futures

Table listing New York metal futures with columns for metal name, last price, and change.

London metal fixes

Table listing London metal fixes with columns for metal name, last price, and change.

INTERNATIONAL STOCK PRICES

Large table listing international stock prices with columns for stock name, price, and change. Includes sections for NEW YORK, LONDON, and PARIS.

Eurobourses gain, topping fine year

WORLD MARKET ROUNDUP

LONDON (Reuters) - Key European stock markets advanced yesterday, with London hitting a new high, while Wall Street, following up a record close on Friday, made further progress in early New York business.
A quiet day is expected today with Japan and some European centers, including Germany, on holiday.
Freezing winter weather, meanwhile, sent oil prices surging. London February futures for market benchmark North Sea Brent Blend crude jumped 55 cents to a high of \$23.97 a barrel before edging back to \$23.77 by late afternoon.
Strength in the dollar - good news for German exporters - helped boost the Frankfurt bourse. It closed at 2,888.69 points, up 35.81 points or 1.26% and only just over 20 points below its record closing level. It eased a little to finish later electronic trade at 2,880.07.
Wall Street's buoyancy, together with higher yields and bonds and takeover speculation, prompted the London stock market, Europe's busiest, to move up into uncharted territory.
The FTSE 100 index of leading British shares ended 24.7 points higher at 4,115.7, its highest ever intraday and closing level. It finished 1995 at what was then a record 3,689.3 close.
Speculation that British Aerospace would merge with another group boosted its shares by 30 pence, or more than 4%, to a record £12.75. Shares in British retailers also gained as investors bet on bumper Christmas sales.
The Paris bourse, which like London will be open for a final 1996 session today, also moved ahead to show a gain on the year of almost 23.9%. French shares took their cue for a rise from Wall Street, a stronger franc and higher bonds.
The CAC-40 share index ended up 11.68 at 2,318.63. It closed last year at 1,980.68.
In Frankfurt the 30-share DAX index coded floor trade at 2,888.69 points, up 35.81 points or 1.26% and only just over 20 points below its record closing level. It eased a little to finish later electronic trade at 2,880.07.
But while many other major stock markets have hit new highs in 1996, Tokyo ended its final trading day of the year at just its record level of seven years ago. The Nikkei average closed at 19,361.35, down 7.69 points on the day and around 500 below its 1995 close.
Concern about the weakness of the Japanese economy and its sagging stocks put more pressure on the yen, with movements exaggerated by the thin end-of-year markets, dealers said.

Late profit-taking sends Dow lower

WALL STREET REPORT

NEW YORK (AP) - Stocks pulled lower near the close yesterday as investors tinkered with their portfolios before the year's end, securing some profits from last week's modest rally.
On Wall Street, the Dow Jones industrial average closed down 11.54 points at 6,549.37, after holding a gain of about 20 points just 15 minutes before the close.
Broader-market indexes also slid into the close, crasing gains that would have given some measures their first record highs in a month.
Stocks drew some early support from the bond market, where prices rose and interest rates fell as the dollar improved in currency markets.
But the advance in the Treasury market was muffled by some potentially inflationary indications in the day's economic news.
The National Association of Realtors reported that sales of existing homes unexpectedly rose 1.8 percent in November, the first increase in six months, as mortgage rates continued to fall. Many analysts had expected the rally to dip last month.
The prospect of growing demand for houses and home furnishings spurred some concerns about inflation, which hurts fixed-income investments such as bonds.
Earlier, the Conference Board research group reported that its gauge of future economic growth increased 0.1% in November. It was the 10th straight month with a drop in the Index of Leading Economic Indicators and the latest piece of evidence pointing to moderate growth.
Technology bellwethers remained under pressure. In Nasdaq trading, Sun Microsystems, Intel and Dell Computer slipped. On the NYSE, IBM was one of the Dow's weakest issues, and Compaq Computer fell.
The Dow's strongest issues were Boeing and Alcoa.
Advancing issues outnumbered decliners by more than a 5-to-4 margin on the New York Stock Exchange, with 1,406 up, 1,106 down and 842 unchanged.
NYSE volume totaled 339.01 million shares as of 4 p.m., vs. 252.48 million in the previous session.
The Standard and Poor's 500-stock index fell 2.94 to 753.83, and the NYSE's composite index fell 0.68 to 397.42.

Bundesbank president: EMU to reduce economic independence

FRANKFURT (Reuters) - Bundesbank President Hans Tietmeyer has stepped into a row over the future European single currency by saying it would clearly reduce the financial and economic independence of those countries involved.
Tietmeyer, in an article to be published in Germany's Handelsblatt newspaper today, said economic and monetary union (EMU) due in 1999 would demand a "high degree of lasting common interest" among all of the participants.
"It would be wishful thinking to believe that within currency union the independence of the member countries... can be fully retained in economic and financial policies," he said in a copy of the article released before publication.
Tietmeyer's comments came after German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel had earlier engaged British politicians by warning Britain that it must decide whether it wanted closer integration within Europe or not.
Kinkel had used a New Year message to tell Britain it needed to reach "a clear decision" on its European policy. "Britain belongs to Europe. Europe needs Britain," he added.
John Major's Conservative government has not yet made up its mind on whether it wants to join EMU in 1999, and the issue is becoming increasingly sensitive as the country gears up for a general election due by next May.
A spokesman for Kinkel later denied that the comments were an attempt to influence the internal affairs of another country, saying the statement was intended as an expression of goodwill.
Unease about the potential impact of EMU on the national policies of individual countries had earlier been expressed by Swedish Prime Minister Goran Persson, who warned that the future European Central Bank might become too powerful.
"The common, strong and independent central bank that will handle the common monetary policy on its own might lack a counterbalancing force in European fiscal policies," he wrote in an editorial article for a Swedish newspaper.
Persson said that while Sweden would be able to join EMU if it wanted, the power of such central authorities could mean that European Union would be transformed into something quite different from that which the Swedes voted to join in 1994.
But the Bundesbank's Tietmeyer stressed in his article that the arrival of the Euro would make it more important for countries to assume their internal policies to those in the wider currency union.
"In particular, fiscal and wage policies must (as a result) be fitted to the demands of currency union and, what's more, over the long-run," he said.
Isolated reactions by EMU-member countries to external events - such as the oil crisis of the 1970s - could run in conflict to wider European monetary policy, he said.

Predictions for the New Year
Cocktail parties, '50s look and certified e-mail will be 'in' in 1997

IN 1997, America's "in" crowd will socialize at cocktail parties, spend vacations on cruises or at spas, dress with a retro-'50s look and send certified e-mail messages to keep in touch.
Only those behind the times will listen to country music or rap, camp out or go mountain biking.
That's according to The American Forecaster Almanac 1997. Denver author Kim Long's 14th annual compendium of trend predictions. Long's predictions are based on his perusal of newspapers, magazines, trade journals, online databases, statistical data and public surveys.
Men will slick back their hair and grow sideburns, and goatees - a badge of grunge music devotees - will go mainstream. Two trends in women's hairstyles will be big hair and short poufs, he says.
Younger people, who rediscovered the martini in recent years, are leading the revival of the cocktail party, the social centerpiece of the 1950s and 1960s, the Forecaster says.
Cake will be downsized by bakers to appeal to singles and consumers looking for smaller portions and bargains.
The US Postal Service will introduce certified e-mail in 1997, with a time and date stamp to verify delivery. Initial cost: 22 cents per message.
Country and rap music will lose ground, with rap sales continuing the slide that started in 1996, according to the Forecaster.
In fashion, "Granny Glamour" will gain a firmer foothold as middle-age women begin showing off their figures. Also, a return to femininity may take hold, as laces, ruffles and bows become more popular.
The Forecaster says the nerd look has become accepted fashion - from goofy glasses down to shapeless shoes, but without the pocket protector. Other nerdy accessories that are catching on: shirts buttoned to the neck, mismatched, loud patterns and skin-tight pants and shirts.
Fewer people will camp out in 1997, a result of Baby Boomers' waning enthusiasm for

Internet will offer new worlds, but more gridlock

FOR many computer owners, 1997 will be the year when Internet users will begin to see more features aimed at making the Net more lifelike. But it is also likely to be marked by frequent communications breakdowns caused, in part, by increased demand.
I wrote a year ago about a collapse, but it's really collapsing, getting more frequent, deeper and longer," said Robert Metcalfe, the inventor of the Ethernet computer networking technology and founder of 3Com Corp who is now vice president of technology at International Data Group, of Boston, Massachusetts.
Metcalfe said the coagulation that causes many people to call the World Wide Web the "World Wide Wait" is only one of many problems that can prompt it to crash.
Major outages have been caused by such seemingly minor events as a rodent chewing a power cable or an ampersand typed in the wrong place in software on central Internet devices.
Over the summer, more than six million customers of America Online Inc., the world's largest online computer service, were without a service for 19 hours because of a software problem.
In October, a failure at Internet service provider BBN Corp's Stanford University Internet facility cut off access for 400 top high tech firms for nearly a day.
Experts such as Metcalfe predict similar types of outages next year as telecommunications companies and Internet providers struggle to keep up with demand.
Still, Web surfers are also likely to see many new features in 1997, from advanced graphics to slick ways to communicate with each other using animated characters in virtual chat rooms and high-tech games.
Dozens of companies, including the Germany-based Black Sun Interactive which recently opened an operation in San Francisco, have been developing new virtual worlds based on a technology called Virtual Reality Modelling Language (VRML).
The technology, pronounced "ver-mul," enables creators of multi-player computer games, for example, to design lifelike characters and three-dimensional settings that will exploit new 3-D computer chip designs and speeded-up microprocessors with added multimedia features due next year.
New capabilities include interactive, three-dimensional fly-over cities created by the startup Bigbook, which allows users to swoop down on a building and click on it with a mouse to see who the occupants are.
But as the Net becomes more lifelike, the prospects for a showdown between regulators and free-speech advocates over the issue of online pornography is likely to increase.
In October, the US Federal Bureau of Investigation said it was investigating an electronic mail message sent to thousands of Internet users offering child pornography for sale.
The question of whether to regulate the content of the Internet, both within a country's borders and internationally, comes as officials in Washington are pressing for reductions in sexual and violent content in film and television.
One solution offered by some software firms is a device like television's V-chip, which allows parents to restrict access to certain programs.
Next year will also see new electronic communities in which people can participate as consumer, customer, contributor or even investor in enterprises over the Web.
Although 1997 will not be the year people rush out to do all their shopping on line, it will be a critical year for deploying the technologies that will make electronic commerce widely available in 1998 and 1999, according to analysts.
Michael Parekh, Internet analyst at Goldman Sachs, expects companies to continue using Internet technology both in internal networks, known as Intranets, and to create what are known as Extranets, to reach customers and suppliers.
"The big thing for 1997 is going to be the way users think of the Web goes from a pull paradigm to a push paradigm," he said, referring to the goal of being able to send data to individuals rather than waiting for them to seek it.
In the US, only about one third of the country's 97 million households have a personal computer, and just 11 percent of US households are estimated to have the modern devices necessary to link them to the Internet.
Faster, 56-kilobit modems are due next year, but analysts expect a battle over standards will slow their spread. (Reuters)

1 Market percentages signals contract exp. date
2 Market percentages are from approximately 2:30 Israel time. All others are closing quotes.
3 CommStock Trading Ltd. (Date 30-DEC-96)

